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XIII.—PEPPER, PICKLE, AND KIPPER.

When we find an English word beginning with *p*, we quite properly suspect it of being an adopted word—if not evidently imitative or of nursery origin. For early English words beginning with *p* there are two chief sources: Latin (including indirectly Greek) and Celtic. If the word appears only in England, it may *a priori* have come from either of these languages. If it is found both in England and on the continent, it is almost sure to have come from the Latin. *Pickle* appears both in England and in North Germany, Holland, etc., and we are therefore justified in suspecting a Latin origin for it. It also belongs to the category of words that we know to have been largely drawn from Italy. In the earliest days the Italian traders introduced *piper* ‘pepper,’ *vinum* ‘wine,’ *acetum* ‘essig,’ etc. Later the Germanic peoples owed much of the development of the culinary art among them to the Christian priests and monks from Italy. They were fond of good living, of spices and of sauces. They brought with them from the South seeds and plants, and they raised vegetables and herbs for the table and for the cure of the sick. It is, therefore, but natural that we should suppose that so artificial a product as pickles should have had a

similar source. These considerations and a knowledge of the South-German use of *pfeffer* in senses similar to those of *pickle* led me to associate *pickle* with *pepper*. One kind of pickling suggested that *kipper* was only another form of the same word.

The following are the important forms :—

OHG. *pfeffar*.

MHG. *pfeffer*.

NHG. *pfeffer*, *pfefferfisch*, *pfeffergurke*, etc., and, from Low German, *pökel*, *pökelfleisch*, *pickelhering*.

MLG. *peper*, *pekel*, *pickel*.

MnLG. *peper*, *pekel*, *pickel*, *pekelhering*, etc.

MDu. *peper*, *pekel*.

MnDu. *peper*, *pekel*, *pekelharing*, etc.

OFrz. *pipier*.

MnFrz. *peper*, *päper*, *pekel*, *päkel*, *pekelherink*, etc.

OE. *pipor*, *pipier*.

ME. *pipier*, *peper*, *pikil*.

MnE. *pepper*, *pickle*, *pickleherring*, etc., *kepper*, *kipper*, *kippel*.

Icelandic *piparr*, *pækill*, *saltpækill* 'saltpetre.'

Sw. *peppar*.

Dan. *peber*.

The Latin word offered a temptation to dissimilate. We find that this happened in the two chief ways that would be most natural : (1) *pip-* > *pik-*; (2) *pip-* > *kip-*. Cf. Skt. *pipilā-* > Pali *kipilla-*, Lat. *papilio* > Du. *pepel* and *kapel* (in *capellenvogel*). Lat. *papȳrum* > OE. *tapor*, Eng. *taper*, OF. *poupe* 'nipple,' 'breast' > *pouque* 'bag,' Ger. *pumpe* > Rhinefrankish *kumpe* (*gumbe*), Lat. *plēbānus* > Lith. *klebōnas*, etc. Lat. *hippopotamus* became *ypotamus* in Middle English, with loss of whole syllable (Brugmann<sup>2</sup>, I, § 988); and children now usually call it *hitapotamus*. Eng. *hickock* became *hicket* and the proper names *Babcock* and *Bartlett* are often called, even by the members of the families, *Babcot* and *Barklett*. Cf. also Brugmann<sup>2</sup>, I, p. 853. The dissimilated forms of the

word we have under consideration appear only in the North—in Low German, Dutch, Frisian, English, and Scandinavian.

In the Germanic forms the Latin suffix *-er* is sometimes exchanged with *-el*. Compare the same phenomenon in OHG. *amar* > MHG. *amer* and *amel*, OHG. *hadara* > MHG. *hader* and *hadel*, OHG. *zinseri* > MHG. *zinsel*, OHG. *panthera* > MHG. *panter* and *pantel*, and see Wilmanns<sup>2</sup>, I, § 114. The *i* also interchanges with *e*, for which see Wilmanns<sup>2</sup>, I, § 181, middle p. 235, and Morsbach's *Mittelenglische Grammatik*, §§ 113–115. For the *ö* of German *pökel*, see Wilmanns<sup>2</sup>, I, § 230.<sup>1</sup>

The chief meanings of the words are as follows:<sup>2</sup>—

I. *pepper*, *pfeffer*, etc.

(1) (a) The fruit of the pepper plant, whether powdered or in the berry.

(b) The latter is also called *pepper-corn*, which word then assumes the general meaning of anything small or of small value, also the technical meaning 'a rent or other consideration that is only nominal.' The verb 'to *pepper*' also has acquired a general meaning: 'to pelt with kernels of any grain or with other small bodies.' (*English and German*.)

(2) (a) A spiced sauce containing vinegar, stewed elderberries, etc. (*Tyrol*). A similar pearsauce, plumsauce, etc. (*Nassau*).

(b) A sauce or gravy of which the brine forms a small or a large part and to which vinegar is usually added. This is

<sup>1</sup> It is strange that Wilmanns attributes the change of *e* to *ö* to a neighboring *l* or *sch*, and admits the influence of a neighboring labial only in the dialects. There are but four words in his list that do not contain a labial, and more than that number that contain a labial but do not contain an *l* or *sch*. The truth appears to be that labials and *sch* and *l* tend to labialize an *e*, and that they are particularly successful if a labial and an *l* or *sch* occur near the same *e*, just as English *u* is generally retained only between a labial and an *l* or *sh* (*full*, *pull*, *bull*, *wolf*, etc.; *push*, *bush*, etc.), while it sinks and becomes unrounded elsewhere (*but*, *cup*, *us*, etc.; *rush*, *gush*, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> The meanings of the three words are classified and arranged alike, so that the corresponding uses may easily be found.

poured over the pickled meat (cf. 3 below) after it has been boiled (in the brine, in *Bavaria*) or roasted (in *Hesse*, etc.), and is about to be served. Also distinguished as 'ein schwarzer pfeffer' or 'ein gelber pfeffer,' also 'pfefferbrühe' or 'pfeffersauce.' Cf. English 'peppersauce.'

(c) ———.

(3) A brine containing spices for pickling fish, game, and very fat meat, especially hare, mutton, goose, and pork; for example, 'einen hasen in pfeffer einmachen.' The period of pickling varies: in *Silesia* over night, in *Hesse* one or two days, in *Bavaria* four to eight days. (*Silesia, Austria, Bavaria, Württemberg, Switzerland, Hesse.*)

(4) The process: to *pepper, pfeffern, einpfeffern.*

(a) To strew or season with pepper.

(b) To strew or rub with pepper, etc., as a means of preserving: *gepfefferte würste, gepfefferte haringe, eingepfefferte melonen.*

(5) (a) The thing pickled according to 4: *hasenpfeffer, gänsepfeffer; pfeffergurke*, etc. Also the thing otherwise made with pepper = *pfefferwurst* etc.

(b) ———.

(6) Figuratively:—

(a) = 'pungent' in *pepperroot* etc., cf. *kippernut*.

(b) = uncomfortable situation: *in den pfeffer geraten; er liegt (or sitzt) im pfeffer; aus dem pfeffer laufen; einen aus dem pfeffer helfen.*

All these meanings the word *pepper, pfeffer*, still has in High-German territory. In the North and in England the byforms *pekel, pökel, pickle* and *kepper, kipper, kippel* have relieved it of some of its burden. It was natural that the original thing, the pepper itself, should retain the more original form of the word. The dealers were familiar with it in bills and orders and they and, in many cases, their customers could see the word daily in distinct letters on the front of the pepper drawer or can. The corrupted forms, therefore, attached themselves to the home preparations and

thus the differentiated forms accommodated themselves to the differentiated meanings.

II. The form *pekel*, *pökel*, *pickle* has the following meanings—using the same numbers as above.

(1) (a) ———.

(b) 'A kernel of any kind of grain ;' then, more generally, 'anything of small size or value,' so 'a small amount' or 'a small number' of anything, 'a few.' (*Scotland.*) Where *mickle* becomes *muckle*; for example, in Aberdeenshire, *pickle* becomes *puckle*.

(2) (a) A spiced liquid containing a large amount of vinegar and used for preserving cucumbers, peaches, pears, blackberries, etc. (*England, Scotland, and America.*) Before being pickled in this way, the cucumbers are immersed in a brine for about a day.

(b) ———.

(c) A liquid consisting of brine and vinegar for pickling tongue, etc. (*England, Scotland, and America.*)

(3) A brine (sometimes spiced) for pickling fish and meat, especially herring, pork, and beef. (*North Germany, Holland, Frisia, England, etc.*)

(4) The process: to *pickle*, *pökeln*, *einpökeln*, to put up meat, fish, vegetables, and fruit in vinegar or brine (or both), to which various spices and leaves have been added.

(5) (a) The thing pickled, especially pickled vegetables. Thus pickled cucumbers are called *cucumber pickles*, cf. also *tomato pickles*, *mixed pickles*, and *pickles* in general. Fish and meats are usually distinguished as *pickled herrings*, *pickled pork*, etc.

(b) The thing that is most commonly pickled is often spoken of as a *pickle* even before the process. Thus we speak of 'putting up pickles' and of 'buying pickles (= cucumbers) to put up.' Last fall a farmer came to the door and, when my wife asked him whether he had any cucumbers, he answered: "Not this morning, but I have some very nice cucumber pickles," meaning cucumbers too small to slice up

but just right for pickling. Children and, in some parts, even grown people call cucumbers on the vine 'pickles.' Hence, too, *pickleworm* 'a worm that infests cucumber vines.'

(6) Figuratively:—

(a) ———.

(b) = uncomfortable situation: *He left us in a pretty pickle* (England, etc.), *in de pekel zitten* (Holland), *er liegt im pökel* (North Germany).

III. The form *kepper*, *kipper*, *kippel* is, so far as I know, restricted to English. *kipper* is now the usual form.

(1) ———.

(2) ———.

(3) ———.

(4) The process: to *kipper*.

(a) ———.

(b) 'To prepare or cure, as salmon, herring, etc., by cleaning them well, giving them several dry rubbings of pepper and salt, and then drying them, either in the open air or artificially by means of smoke or peat or juniper berries.'—*Century Dictionary*.

(5) (a) The salmon, herring, or trout kippered according to 4.

(b) The salmon, herring, or trout not yet kippered, especially one in the stage when they are (or formerly were) most commonly kippered, rather than eaten fresh, that is, in the spawning season, and particularly the spent male salmon. "He [Scott], and Skene of Rubislaw, and I were out one night about midnight, leistering [spearing] kippels in Tweed," Hogg, quoted in the *Century Dictionary*. "That no person take and kyl any Salmons or Trowtes, not beyng in season, being kepper Salmons, or kepper Trowtes, shedder Salmons, or shedder Trowtes," Acts Hen. VII., c. 21. Rastell's Statutes, Fol. 182, a, quoted by Jamieson. Hence the spawning season is called *kipper-time*: "That no salmon be taken between Gravesend and Henly upon Thames in kipper-time, viz., between the Invention of the Cross (3 May) and the

Epiphany." Rot. Parl. 50, Edw. III., Cowel, Quoted by Jamieson.

(6) Figuratively :—

(a) = 'pungent' in *kippernut*, cf. *pepperroot*, etc.

(b) ———.

The development and the branching of the meaning of *pepper*, etc., are very natural. From the fruit of the plant itself it spread to various preparations containing pepper and other spices; cf. the use of *honig* in *honigkuchen* and of *ginger* in *gingerbread*, *gingerpears*, etc. That in the form *pickle* it was in time applied to processes in which little or no pepper was used is not at all strange. We find the same where the form *pepper* itself is used, namely, in *pfefferkuchen*, which is usually made without any pepper at all. But, of course, this extension was more likely to take place in *pickle* than in *pepper*, because the latter word constantly reminds one of its original meaning, while *pickle* does not. The development of the word was not the same in all parts. A chief point of difference is whether vinegar or brine is used. In most of North Germany brine alone is understood by *pökel*, while, on the contrary, in many parts of England the word *pickle* necessarily implies the use of vinegar. In those parts of England and America, in which this is the case, we hear of *salt herring*, *salt pork*, and *corned beef*, of *salting down* and of the *brine* not the *pickle*. So in parts of Germany, especially Middle Germany, where neither *pökel* nor *pfeffer* is employed, we hear of *salzfleisch*, *salzgurke* or *sauere gurke* (dill pickle), of *einsalzen* or *in satz legen*, and of *salzlake* or *salzbrühe*. In some parts *pökeln* is restricted to pork; herrings, for example, being called *salzheringe* or *gesalzene heringe*. In some cases, for example, in pickling ordinary cucumbers (*pfeffergurken* or *essiggurken*), the things to be pickled are first placed in a brine and afterwards in vinegar; in others, for example, in pickling tongue, the pickle consists of both brine and vinegar. Hence the confusion of the two processes of preserving was almost inevitable.



It will be well to consider briefly the etymologies heretofore given for *pickle* and *kipper*.

No one has ever offered a satisfactory explanation of the word *pickle* *pökel*. The German books repeat, with more or less disapproval, an old story according to which the word is due to the name of a man who first invented the process, Wilhelm Böckel or Bökel. But it has long ago been shown that this is impossible. The change of *b* to *p* is irregular, and such a German form could never explain the English form; moreover the English word and the process long antedate Wilhelm Böckel. Koolmann, in his *Wörterbuch der Ostfriesischen Sprache*, derives the word from Du. *beek*, Eng. *beck*, Ger. *bach*, assuming 'fluid' as the original meaning; but the *p* of *pickle*, etc., makes this too impossible. The original character of the *p* is thoroughly established and in no way invalidated by the rare spelling *bökel* (for *pökel*), which is probably due to *böcking* and *böckling* 'smoked her-ring,' or to the erroneous association of the word with the name *Böckel*, just as Mahn contrariwise changes the name *Böckel* to *Pökel* to agree with *pökeln*. Others suggest that the word may be derived from Eng. *pick*—thus Wedgwood calls attention to the meaning 'cleanse' that *pick* is said to have locally, and Kluge, refers to the meaning 'prick' that *pick* sometimes shows, evidently having in mind the sharp, pungent taste of pickles. But the authors of these suggestions make them in a half-hearted way, evidently because at a loss for something better.

Two plausible but erroneous etymologies of *kipper* have been brought forward. The first derives it from *kip* 'point,' with reference to the 'beak' that the male salmon is said to have when he has spent milt. A similar idea appears to have been in Walton's mind when he wrote: "Those [i. e., salmon] . . . left behind by degrees grow sick and lean, and unseasonable, and kipper—that is to say, have bony gristles grow out of their lower chaps," *Complete Angler*, p. 122, quoted in *Century Dictionary*. The idea, at first sight, seems a natural

one; it is, however, a case of popular etymology. If the fish were named for the sort of hook that it appears to have when spent, we should expect it to be called at best a '*kipped salmon*,' or perhaps a '*kip*' or '*kippie*.' To call it a *kipper* would be like calling a beaked bird a '*beaker*,' the horned owl a '*horner*,' the tufted titmouse a '*tufter*,' the spotted bass a '*spotter*,' or the speckled trout a '*specker*' or '*speckler*.' Nouns in *-er* are, for the most part, derived from verbs and denote an agent or actor (*fighter, giver, speaker*, etc.). When derived from other nouns, they denote a functionary (*jailor, bencher, executioner, larderer*), or one following a line of business (*fruiter, palmer, lawyer*); they never, to my knowledge, denote the possessor of a peculiarity, except in the comparatively recent slang of English universities. Furthermore, the beaklike lower jaw of the spent salmon bends down ["the male salmon, often especially during the spawning season, having his nose beaked down like a bird's bill," cf. Jamieson under *kipper nose*], but a *kip* is an upturned point, a peak (especially of a mountain), and 'to *kip*' is to turn up or to be turned up, as the horns of cattle, etc. So '*kip-nosed*' means 'having the nose turned up at the point'—our '*pug-nosed*.' A '*kipper nose*,' on the contrary, is a long beaked nose: "This scene went on—the friar standing before the flame, and Tum and Giffie, with their long kipper noses, peeping over his shoulder," *Perils of Man*, II, 50, quoted by Jamieson.—The usual etymology of the word traces it to Du. *kippen* 'to hatch,' from which the step to 'to spawn' is easy, and thus Skeat says a *kipper* is a 'spawner.' If this were true, we should expect the word to be applied particularly to the female fish; but, when any distinction of sex is made, the term is applied specifically to the male, the female being called a '*shedder*' or '*roan*' (cf. Jamieson). The derivation of the word from the Dutch would be natural if this process of preserving fish and, with the process, the name for it had come from Holland. We know, however, that the Dutch have no word corresponding to *kipper*, and, so far as I can

learn, even *kippen* is not used of fish in Holland. In Dutch and Low German the word means primarily to 'peck' or 'pick,' then specifically of a young bird or chick in the egg, that picks the shell open; also of the old bird or hen that aids it with her bill. It might be urged that *kipper* was not derived directly from the continental *kippen* but from a cognate English verb that is lost, but whose meaning may have been extended from birds to fish, from hatching chicks to spawning. Now, it happens that there not only was such an English verb but that it still exists; its meaning is, however, as restricted as that of the continental *kippen*, and its form, as was to be expected, is *chip* not *kip*. As *kipper* is not restricted to those parts of England that retain original *k* before *i*, we should expect the word, if derived from original *k*, to have in most of England the form *chipper*, which to my knowledge it never has.

Both of these attempts to explain the word have made it necessary to ignore the natural and usual meaning of *kipper* and to seek its explanation in one of its rarer meanings. Cf. Skeat: "Kipper, to cure or preserve salmon. (Du.). This meaning is quite an accidental one, arising from a practice of curing *kipper-salmon*, i. e., salmon during the spawning season." The association of *kipper* with *pepper* shows that the most usual meaning of the word (namely, the fish preserved by being subjected to "dry rubbings of pepper and salt," not the living fish) is the more original, as we observe also in the case of *pickle* as applied to the preserved cucumber and to the green cucumber.

This etymology clearly illustrates the fact, so often forgotten, that the solution of a problem in English word-lore frequently lies in one of the other Germanic languages. Without an acquaintance with the South-German usage as to the word *pfeffer* no one would have thought of associating English *pepper*, *pickle*, and *kipper*.

GEORGE HEMPL.